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AUTHOR Konzal, Jean L.
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ABSTRACT

To address the question of whether common ground in the area of school reform is possible among parents, and between parents and educators, a qualitative inquiry used theater scripts created from interviews with parents, teachers, and school administrators. The study was conducted in a small New England town where changing demographics had resulted in a diverse population with a variety of mental models of good schools. Discussions and disagreements had to do with new curriculums in mathematics and social studies. The scripts showed clearly that once educational leaders decide to build communities that include parents they will face many obstacles to common understanding. Some of these obstacles were: diversity of parent backgrounds and mental models, a gap between parent and teacher understanding about what makes a good school, ambivalence about the status of parents in the school community, lack of mutual trust and respect, and time constraints. One conclusion of the study was that educational leaders need to fashion a community in which parents and professionals together construct models of a "good" school. (Contains 39 references.) (LH)

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A Dilemma for Secondary School Leaders: Developing Common Understandings About "Good" Classroom Practices Among Parents and Between Parents and Educators

Paper Presented
at the

Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association

Jean L. Konzal, Ed. D.
8424 East Lake Road
Erie, PA 16511
konzal@worldnet.att.net

Chicago, Illinois
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Introduction

Secondary school reformers, such as Boyer (1983) and Sizer (1984, 1992), argue that to prepare citizens who are able to deal with today's complex problems, we need a more rigorous curriculum and a more engaging pedagogy. Calls to change our teaching and learning practices are not new. Throughout the century reformers have tried to change these practices in our secondary schools, but to little avail (Hampel, 1986). While programs have been added to the core curriculum and the quality of the relationships between teachers and students have changed, the core teaching and learning practices have changed little (Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1990). Efforts to change these traditional classroom teaching and learning practices have been resisted throughout the century by both teachers and parents. In some cases, parents have advocated for change and have met with resistance from the educational establishment. In other cases, educators have advocated for change and have met with parental resistance. Both parents and educators involved in change efforts express their frustrations about their interactions with each other (Fine, 1993; Prestine, 1994).

Our latest attempts to reform classroom practices are again being met by resistance from parents (Bradley, 1994; Johnson & Immerwahr, 1994). In response to these criticisms some states are experimenting with school choice options such as charter schools and school vouchers to private and religious schools, casting parents in the role of consumer in a market economy (Lindsay, 1995; Education Week, 1995). Another response to this issue has been the renewed call for thinking about schools as communities--communities inclusive of parents (Driscoll, 1995).

We know from the literature on high schools that one of the characteristics of strong high schools is that they are places where all of the participants--teachers, students, administrators and parents--have common understandings and are in agreement about what should be happening in the school (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Lightfoot, 1983). Schools grounded in either functional or valuational communities facilitate this consensus (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Strike, 1993). Functional communities are where families live in close proximity and have social connections with each other so that common expectations for children are reinforced by all adults within the community (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Valuational communities are communities where people have similar value systems, but are not necessarily connected socially. Schools which are grounded in both valuational and functional communities have the most potential for reaching consensus about "good schools."

Because charter schools and school vouchers give parents the opportunity to choose schools for their children that most closely match their value systems, these arrangements

have the potential of creating schools where there is a common set of values--a valuational community--but not necessarily functional communities. Neither type of community, however, is found in most comprehensive public high schools today. Until recently, reform efforts, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools which focus on secondary schools, attended mainly to forging valuational communities amongst the faculty (Sergiovanni, 1994; Useem, et al, 1996)--leaving little time or energy to focus on building either functional or valuational communities inclusive of parents. More recently, with the realization that without parental support, reforms were vulnerable to pressure from discontented parents and other community members, secondary schools have begun to confront the dilemma of giving more than lip service to including parents in the school community. However, given the diversity of most school communities and the lack of social connectedness of parents, whether this is possible is still open to question.

Parents who do not share either functional or valuational communities will most likely have very different "mental models" of what constitutes a good school. "Mental models" according to Peter Senge (1990) are "images, assumptions, and stories...that shape our perceptions" (p. 175). Parents come to the schooling of their children with "mental models" about "good" schools and evaluate school practices through the screens of these models. The dilemma for practitioners is twofold. First, the more diverse the population in terms of their past experiences with schooling, the more diverse will be the mental models held by the parents in the schools; and secondly, for the most part these mental models are not articulated but "exist below the level of awareness" (p. 176). In order for a school community to eventually come to common ground about what makes a good school, first, they must build a foundation of trust and respect so that uncovering different mental models is a risk people are willing to take (Sarason, 1995). Then they must be committed to find ways to infuse the school environment with opportunities for parents and educators to examine and debate their diverse perspectives. Only then will they have the potential to forge new mental models which are common and which may lead to the creation of the kind of school they all want.

THE STUDY

The goal of this study was to uncover the complexities of today's reform efforts in secondary schools--especially as they apply to the relationships among parents and between parents and educators engaged in reform efforts This study was conducted in a small-town New England high school community undergoing many changes--Grover's Corners[1]. The

[1] With much humility and with apologies to Thornton Wilder (1938), I borrowed his town, Grover's Corners, as a setting for the readers theater scripts I first wrote. The town we find ourselves in today is

town was experiencing an in-flux of people "from away"[2] and the school was introducing new teaching and learning practices. Among these new practices were two controversial curriculum reforms, one in math and the other in social studies. In both cases some parents raised concerns about the changes. In the case of the math curriculum, modifications were made as a result of the outcry from parents. In the case of the social studies curriculum--while the program was designed with some parental concerns in mind--some parents still expressed concerns but modifications were not made.

The New Math Curriculum

The new math curriculum was developed by two math educators without the input of parents. It was conceived as an integrated spiraling curriculum with courses renamed from the traditional Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, College Math to the new Math 1, Math 2, Math 3 and Math 4. Classes are grouped heterogeneously and the curriculum promotes cooperative group work.

When presented to the parents, an explosion of opposition occurred. Parents didn't understand the idea of an integrated curriculum, they didn't like the idea of naming the courses Math 1, 2, etc., and they didn't like the idea of heterogeneous classes. Educators felt attacked on all sides. After the initial outburst and angry interactions from both sides, over the next three years parents and educators sat down and hammered out a new approach to the curriculum that, in retrospect, educators say is an even stronger curriculum than the one they first developed.

While, with the help of parents who knew their children well, educators were able to develop a curriculum that has led to significantly improved math performance for all levels of student, in retrospect, educators in this school are still not sure that parents should be involved in curriculum development efforts. Not only are these educators still ambivalent about the role parents should play, but the experience left both educators and parents with angry feelings about each other. Unfortunately the ambivalence still felt by educators about parental participation in curriculum matters suggests that gaining common understandings will not be easy.

The New Social Studies Curriculum

The new social studies course "...is a two-year required course that studies the interrelationships between the State..., the U.S. and the world, past and present...the

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rooted in memories of life in small town New England and is reminiscent of the Grover's Corners, created by Wilder. *Our Town* casts a nostalgic shadow of life as it was on the Grover's Corners of today.

[2]In some New England states people not born in the state are referred to as coming "from away."

course includes much more than history and is better described as an integrated social studies course...designed to help students learn the essential concepts, information, and skills they will need as responsible and prosperous citizens in the 21st century" (Thomas, Miller & Walters, 1994).

The teachers wrote their own textbook distilling American history, sociology and anthropology, political science and economics to core concepts that they thought every student should know; required all students to master this knowledge at an 85% level; and required students to develop and orally present two major end-of-the-year exhibitions. The sophomore presentations are dramatic monologues written by the student in the voice of a figure in American history. The junior presentations are public policy papers on issues of the student's choosing. Assessment of student learning is a mixture of traditional multiple choice teacher-made tests for the core knowledge and performance-based assessment of research, analysis, and public presentation skills.

They asked students to take a much more active role in their education and incorporated a variety of instructional strategies (videodiscs, lectures, games) to try to meet the different learning styles and different pace of learning of individual students. Teachers provided, and students who were having difficulty attaining the 85% mastery of the core knowledge, were required to attend academic coaching after-school. For the first three years the course was tracked into two levels. With the fourth year, however, the course was grouped heterogeneously but with the opportunity for students to earn an honors designation based on mastering the core content tests the first time they take them.

The three social studies teachers responsible for this new course were leaders in the school's restructuring efforts and had born the brunt of the internal faculty struggles over the long years of debate about the form that reform would take at Grover's Corners High School. Lessons learned from that struggle, as well as lessons learned from the eruption of parental concerns about the math curriculum, caused them to think strategically about introducing their new course. Attending to parental concerns, while not the primary driving force behind how they designed the course, influenced the way they crafted their course. One of the social studies teachers explains:

> We have made some modifications that we felt didn't compromise the goals and objective of quality learning in ways that would not create unnecessary anxiety in parents. A specific example would be that...parents grew up getting a test every 3 weeks on Friday or whatever. We don't go by any set schedule, we get there when we get there, but we do some core content type testing. We feel that's a confidence builder for the parents--that they know that that's a part of the curriculum and that gives them a sense of confidence that...even if there are some other things in the class that don't seem quite like the way they were when they were in school, this is one that gives us some credibility to have some freedom to do some other things.

> And gives them some comfort and confidence that the kids aren't just doing a completely "process oriented" or "values oriented" curriculum that's criticized as "mush" and so forth.

While the curriculum was designed with some parents' concerns in mind, some parents' concerns were not addressed. For example, some parents believed that the 85% standard for all students was unreasonable for their child and that it was unfair to hold them to such a high standard. As a result, there remains a wide gulf between what these three social studies teachers understand are "good" practices and what some parents understand are "good" practices.

Inquiry Approach

This paper is based on an arts-based qualitative inquiry conducted in the Fall of 1994. It is arts-based in the sense that I use Elliot Eisner's work on educational criticism as a guide (Eisner, 1991). Eisner offers art criticism as a model for educational researchers and suggests that educational critics follow the model by first appreciating (coming to know well the phenomenon under study by attending carefully to its specific details and characteristics) the phenomena and then making public what one has learned. He challenges researchers to experiment with a variety of forms as they make public their learnings (Eisner, 1993, 1995).

Following this model, I gained a deep appreciation for what was happening in the school I was studying by using a variety of approaches. I spent three two-week sessions on site. During that time in order to gain an appreciation for the educators' points of view concerning parental attitudes about changing teaching and learning practices I conducted a survey of the entire faculty; I interviewed 21 teachers and administrators, many of whom were actively involved in the school's reform work since its inception; I attended faculty meetings and meetings of planning committees; and I reviewed archival documents related to their reform efforts over the past ten years. In order to understand parental perspectives about these changes I conducted a telephone survey of randomly selected parents (43% responded) of the current twelfth graders (students who were the first to fully experience the two curricula changes I was investigating--math and social studies); I interviewed 38 parents, most of whom had twelfth grade children, but also included some parents of children in other grades due to the difficulty I had in finding enough twelfth grade parents who were willing to talk to me more in depth; I attended meetings of parents; and I reviewed archival documents which included letters from parents concerning past reform efforts.

As I read and reread the transcripts of my interviews of the parents and educators whom I interviewed, it became increasingly clear to me that many times parents and educators speak to each other at cross purposes--neither hearing nor understanding what the other says. It occurred to me that a provocative way of re-presenting what I was finding would be to create dialogue pieces which demonstrated how parents and educators talked without communicating. In the end I went one step further. Taking up the challenge from Eisner (1993) to consider alternative forms of re-presentation, I decided to re-present my findings in the form of two readers theater scripts. I did this for two reasons. The first is that the data I collected seemed to cry out for a form other than the traditional narrative report. And secondly, in thinking about the audience I most wanted to reach--practitioners and parents--it seemed as though readers theater scripts would be more compelling and would have a better chance of inviting parents and practitioners into a dialogue with each other about "good" teaching and learning practices.

Taking up Eisner's challenge to use a variety of genre to re-present learnings, I created two readers theater scripts which addressed the questions: "Is common ground among parents possible?" and "Is common ground between parents and educators possible?". Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer (1995) argue that constructing readers theater scripts follows many of the same processes used by qualitative researchers as they analyze their data. I also found this to be true. Following approaches suggested by researchers such as Merriam (1988) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) I listened to the tapes of my transcripts, I read and reread my field notes and transcripts many times, I identified emerging themes, I coded passages from the text, and I organized and re-organized coded passages into new themes until the underlying story began to emerge.

I approached the script construction process differently for the two scripts. When approaching the task of script construction for the first script, I needed to present individual parents in order to demonstrate how individual past experiences impacted personal mental models about what goes on in good schools. My initial inclination was to write a script around composite characters created from the 38 parental interviews. However, I soon came to realize that creating composites made it very difficult for me to demonstrate the impact of past experiences on personal mental models. Since a script with 38 characters seemed an overwhelming task, I needed another approach. As I read through the parent profiles I realized that the voices of 16 parents came out much more strongly and passionately than did the others. I decided to see if it were possible to construct a script using only these voices without losing the diversity of opinions and experiences represented in the 38 interviews. I created a grid to compare these sixteen parents with the original 38 to make sure that there was a broad representation of parents within this group,

and there was. I then compared the parents to see if any major themes from the group of 38 were omitted from the perspectives of the 16 I chose and there were no significant omissions. I was satisfied that I could use these 16 voices without losing any of the major themes represented in the total group.

The second script was easier for me to deal with. Since I was dealing with the differences between parent and educator perspectives and the barriers that separated them, I could deal with themes and choose representative quotations to represent the themes. For the parents I used representative quotes to demonstrate the differences among parents and their past experiences attempting to communicate with educators. For the educators I used representative quotes from educator voices to illuminate the differences that existed among educators and to illuminate the questions they had about how parents should be involved in schools. My intent was to decenter the prominent voices of the professional and to provide more room for parent voices. My intent, however, was not to privilege parental voices over professional ones, but rather by allowing them more space, to recognize the importance of both parental and educator voices.

In addition to the two scripts, I composed an educational critique of the difficulty of attaining common ground among parents and between parents and educators.[3] This paper is one of three presented at this year's Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association which draws on this work (Konzal, 1997a,b). In this paper, I use excerpts from the two scripts to illustrate my argument that while building communities inclusive of parents would facilitate the development of common understandings about what goes on in "good" secondary schools, this path will not be easy. It is strewn with obstacles which secondary school educational leaders[4] must confront and overcome.

Obstacles to Coming to Common Understandings

Once educational leaders--teachers and administrators--decide to build communities inclusive of parents towards the end of coming to common ground about "good" teaching and learning practices, my research suggests they will face many obstacles. These obstacles include a diversity of mental models of "good" secondary schools and classrooms among parents, a dark side to professional learning communities, an ambivalence among educators about including parents as equal members of the school community, a general lack of mutual trust and respect, and a perception that there's "no time" available to do the

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[3] A full description of my process may be found in Appendix I of my dissertation: Explanation of Inquiry Process (Konzal, 1995).

[4] I speak of "leaders" rather than administrators in order to include teacher leaders in this discussion.

hard work. In the following sections I elaborate on each of these obstacles and use excerpts from the two readers theater scripts I created to illustrate these points.

Obstacle: Diversity of Parental Backgrounds and "Mental Models"

Grover's Corners is an example of a typical comprehensive public high school in many of today's small towns. It serves students from families with a variety of backgrounds, experiences and, therefore, a variety of mental models of "good schools". Parents' diverse "mental models" are influenced by their aspirations for their children, by their personal histories with schooling, and by their previous experiences with their children's schools. It is through the screens of these mental models that parents evaluate a new teaching practice, decide whether or not it is one they like, and decide whether or not they should take action either in opposition to or in support of the change. Because of the changing nature of the town, with the in-flux of people from out-of-state, there has been a growth in the diversity of views about schooling. Strike (1993) suggests that it may not be possible to forge common notions of schooling in schools such as Grover's Corners High School--schools that are not grounded in a valuational community.

While parents in Grover's Corners on first glance look pretty much alike, and in fact, in terms of ethnic and religions diversity they are (well over 90% are of European American background and probably just as many share a Christian perspective), they differ in important ways--in where they were born and raised (and thus their past educational experiences), in their educational attainment and in their occupations. In small towns such as Grover's Corners, it is differences in social class rather than in racial or ethnic background which is the unspoken issue that leads to inequity in educational opportunity. Let me introduce you to the parents who appeared in my scripts[5]:

> **Mrs. Reidy[6]:** I've been here 30 some odd years. I graduated from Grover's' Corners High School, went a year to a business college, because my Dad made me--I hated it. Now I work in the local market. I'm raising my two kids on my own and it's not easy. They're both in high school and need a lot of things. You know, my dad gave me a piece of land, but I can't afford to keep it. I'm a third generation, so my kids are a fourth generation and they (those people from away) would just as soon turn around and say to me or my dad who has major farmland, "Hey, if you can't cut it, then move the hell out." Well, if it wasn't for the people like us who had the land, where would they have gotten their land to build on and then they turn

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5 While I interviewed 38 parents, after an analysis of all of the transcripts, I concluded that I could use the voices of 16 of the parents as representative of all parents. Of all of the parents these parents' voices were most forceful and captured most of the themes appearing in all of the interviews.

6 All names of parents and educators are pseudonyms. Differences in text denote differences of origin: bold type denotes people from town, bold underlined type denotes people from the state, and italicized bold type denotes people "from away."

around and tell us to move. No way. They bring these yuppie couples in, add more kids to the school system, our taxes go up more, and it's just a vicious cycle.

Mrs. Orton: My parents started out in Massachusetts and moved up here. I was born here. But there was just never any doubt that you would do the best you could do, be involved and expose yourself to different things. And if you wanted to do something there's no reason why you couldn't get there. That was how I was brought up.

Mr. Orton: We're old Grover's Corners for sure, but we're not afraid to change. We're just forward thinking people.

Mrs. MacFarland: I didn't go to Grover's Corners High. I went to school in a neighboring community. When I went to school there were 120 in our graduating class and 115 of us went on to higher education. I think that says a lot. I think here in Grover's Corners they don't push that as much as they did in my school. They demanded that I do my best in that classroom. It is not like that anymore. It wasn't like that for my child.

Mr. MacFarland: My family has farmed land in Grover's Corner for many generations. Grover's Corners High School was a lot more relaxed when I was there in the early 1970's.

Mrs. Gleason: I came from less money, what I have is mine. I work for it and I'm proud of it. I tell the boys that. I come from a family of six kids on welfare. I had four sisters, and all five of us slept in one bedroom. I'm not going to let nobody downgrade my two kids.

My husband dropped out of school. I don't think the teachers cared because he used to sleep in class and they'd wake him up when the class was over. I blame his mother too because she wouldn't push him to go in. But he wants his boys to get a good education. We're not going to let nobody downgrade our kids.

Mr. Ballard: I grew up and went to high school in the next town over. I graduated from the technical college and work as a tradesman here in town. My high school made sure that I was prepared to go to technical school. I want my three kids to get as good an education as I got.

Mrs. Jefferson: I went to high school up north. I loved it. My father didn't want me to go to college, he didn't see the point in us going to college. So I had to work to put myself through. It wasn't easy but it was important to me so I did. None of my brothers or sisters did. That's why it's so important for me to make sure that nothing gets in the way of my son's getting a college education.

Mrs. Amberson: I teach in a near-by town. My high school experience was unbelievable. I went to this very, very progressive high school--probably more modern than Grover's Corners is at this point--it was known as the "Country Club." It had just a fabulous music program and an art program. I had extra time in my day added to the beginning and to the end so I could fit in extra courses. But for the kids who weren't interested in school they could get out at 1:00 and go to work.

When I came up here and saw what they had here and heard people say "What was good enough for us back then is good enough for our kids now," I thought, "Well,

gee, it wasn't like that for me!" And so I like seeing them become more progressive. I feel like we're becoming part of the world rather than this little closed community. I think people are more interested in Grover's Corners because of the schools. They've become very well known and people are moving to this community because of it. I'm real happy about that.

Mr. Amberson: I work as a business consultant out of my home. I grew up in a small blue collar section of a predominantly white collar town. I had a good high school experience. There was one teacher there who was very progressive. She taught a class called Projects. It was an independent study. We could study anything we wanted to. "What do you want to study?" she'd ask. So all year, the whole semester, I researched a topic and I had to make presentations every week on my progress. See, I was under the gun. Every single week...once a week and we just talked. I think twice or three times, we had to show our paper and how far we had gotten. There were ten kids in the class and every week, five kids spoke for eight or ten minutes on their projects. We were under the gun, so we read, read, read, and made a presentation, a good presentation.

Mr. Halliwell: Rose and I met in 1971...we were teaching in a junior high school in another state. We had all the middle school stuff then that they're talking about now in Grover's Corners.

Mr. Stanford: I was born in Europe and have lived in five countries but find Grover's Corners a very comfortable place to live. It is very reminiscent of where I grew up. I was born in a working class section where I went to school and eventually I went to one of the best universities in the country. I was in business for 32 years and have come here with my family to indulge my hobby of boat building.

Mr. Lacey: I was born and went to high school in a neighboring state. Mine was a traditional high school 25 years ago. Teaching was traditional. You were in the classroom, you'd get a lesson, you'd do your homework, and then "See you tomorrow". I went to work right out of high school and learned my trade on the job. Now I have my own consulting business and I serve as an advisor to one of the state's technical colleges.

Mrs. Lacey: I was born and went to high school a few towns over from Grover's Corners. I'm a nurse and have two sons, one already in college and one graduating this year. We had a much longer day than they have today. Seven classes a day--must have been 50 minutes per class.

Mrs. Lorenzo: I did well in high school. I was in the national honor society and everything. But my parents were in the middle of divorce when I went to college. I had to pay my own way and commute. It was a very negative experience--traumatizing really--because I had been so used to succeeding and it was like UGH! And then I ended up meeting my husband and we got married and we had the children.

I've been active - that is what I do - when I had the kids that became my thing. To provide for them as best I could up to my ability. So I've always volunteered even with the church groups they belonged to and with the sports teams they participated on. Whatever they're in I try to do--for all five of them.

And as a result of their differences they had very different mental models about what should go on in "good" secondary schools and classrooms. Listen to some parents as they talk about their opinions about some of the changes in the math and social studies curricula. Here they talk about heterogeneous grouping:

Mr. Ballard: I've told my son all his life, when you get to high school they'll have different levels of math that you can take and you'll be in with a bunch of kids of your own ability and you'll be able to go. And he got to high school and math and--NO--there's just one Math 1 for every single kid in that high school and a Math 2 for every single kid in the high school. And it's just knocked the stuffing right out of him. He just wants to graduate and that's it. He was totally turned off. If he had been brought in his freshman year and had got in with a grade level of students of his own ability I'm sure he'd go right on. But after two years of just sitting there with every single kid in the high school in your class, every grade...he just gave up.

Mrs. Amberson: Sometimes they do things for the good of all children and a lot of this heterogeneous stuff is for the good of all children but it's not necessarily the best thing for the low kids or the high kids. It's good for the wide middle but not for those very high kids and those very low kids. Especially the top kids, if the teacher is cognizant of what they're supposed to be doing with these kids and stretching them, then they'll do fine, but if they're not, then they're just biding their time. And that's what I was afraid of for the math. I really was. And I think the first year in math, I think was a lot of biding times, a lot of repeat, you know, what they'd learned before.

Mrs. Lacey: My finding with our son was he always got in with a group that seemed to be covering the same things semester after semester after semester and he was bored. We found that students that understood it weren't able to move on because there were so many students who didn't understand. And therefore, class time was taken to go over it once again and the other ones who did understand the concept got bored.

Mrs. Halliwell: I have a daughter who is a freshman this year and her math program is far different from the one my first daughter went through when they first introduced the program. Sometimes a large group of kids receives instruction and at times the group is broken up and maybe the kids who need a little more time, work with this teacher, and kids who are ready to keep moving ahead work with another teacher. It seems to change with each unit so it's not punitive. It ebbs and flows and then they come back again and they reshuffle and that's really kind of neat. So some of the time they are with kids of their own ability and other times they are with the whole group. I like that.

And here they talk about cooperative group work:

Mrs. Jefferson: I like that, I do like that group work. That happens in life. I think if you can learn to be a team player you are further ahead. You know, my son used to have what he would call a study buddy and his grades actually went up.

Mr. Ballard: I like the idea of it, but what I don't like and I noticed it with my youngest son because he repeatedly tells me about this, that if there's 3 people or 4 people doing a project, many of them end up lugging at least one person. That's one thing I don't really care for. I talked to people that worked for a big company in town

and other places and asked "What do you do about it?" And they said, "Well, if we've got a project and there's five of us on the project and there's one person that's not doing their job, the next time there's a project and his name comes up, the other four of us flat out say 'No way, we're not going to have that person work with us or we won't do that project.' That's how they're doing it at the work place. And it eventually ends up so that nobody wants to work with that person. You've got to have everybody with different abilities--but everybody needs to pull their own weight.

Mrs. Reidy: I think if I was going to try to figure something out with my pals as opposed to having a teacher try to teach it, I might learn it better. Sometimes you get kids that are more on your level, maybe another kid can come up with just such a simple way to show you how to do something that you would remember how to do it. My son did a little bit last year. He doesn't say too much about school at all. But I think he enjoyed it.

Mrs. MacFarland: I had a problem with it when they had three and four kids in a work study group in the classroom and they always put one of the smarter kids with the lesser kids, which is all right, but that is slowing my daughter down. She used to complain about that. She used to come home and say, "Geez, I couldn't get all my work done because I was helping so and so." "Geez, you should be doing your own work first and then helping." And it seemed like that is what the teacher should have been doing.

Mrs. Gleason: I think that working in a group would be good because I think that helps kids to learn to work as a group. When they get out into the world they have to work with different people and be able to discuss things with them. But I would think that that would be a lot harder though, cause nobody's showing them how to do it really. I think my son mentioned that they don't show you, they just tell you to do it.

Mr. Stanford: My son's a straight A student, but he's not as advanced as my daughter was because, well for one reason, the way they group the students--cooperative learning--why the value of that still exists, I don't know.

And here the issue is an integrated spiraling problem-solving curriculum:

Mrs. Reidy: I think that is good. You know, that's something that you really have to put your brains to--problem solving like that. You really have to think about things and that's good

Mrs. Jefferson: The math scares me. The school math concept of Math 1, 2, 3, and 4 absolutely scares me to death and I guess Marcia's class is going to be the first class that has graduated with the whole Math 1, 2, 3, and 4. I just don't know. Going back to when I was in school you really had to conquer Algebra 1, Algebra 2 and each one was a building block onto the next. How they can group them together and expand on that is just beyond me. I can't believe it. Also, I don't know how colleges are going to look at Math 1, 2, 3, and 4 and say, "Oh, okay." That scares me.

Other parents liked the innovations, but thought that they were poorly planned and implemented:

Mr. Halliwell: The problem was they didn't know where they were going. They were totally unfocused. What has really happened, from what I can see, is that Math 1, 2, 3, and 4 are Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, and then...I think it's become more traditional recently, I think it's slid back to where it used to be.

There were also different perspectives about the new social studies curriculum. While for the most part, the parents liked the public policy paper, there was disagreement about the standards students were held to in the class:

Mr. Ballard: Now you can vote when you're 18--there's some kids in those classes that can vote and they should be able to get out there and look at the issues and decide and not just be told this is the way you should vote or this is the way that ought to be. That part's really good.

Mrs. Jefferson: My son's doing that on gun control. He called all of the candidates and got their opinions and wrote a paper. I think that was wonderful. I don't think a lot of people in this country are that up on politics and I don't think they are up on policy making. I think if they get exposure to it young that's wonderful.

Mrs. Reidy: That's great. That is great because at least she can get up in front of people and speak. I remember when I got up at one of our regular town meetings where we were talking about recalling the taxes. There were a lot of things that I really wanted to emphasize to the town council. I got up and I started out fine, but the further I went, the more I could feel myself getting really really hot. You know like "pulling at the shirt" hot. And my legs started to shake and it's like "Shut it off right now dearie, because if you don't, you are going to pass out right here on the floor." So I think that public presentation is definitely a good experience for my daughter. Hopefully she'll never do what I did.

Mrs. Lorenzo: I don't think the forum at the end was as nice as I would have liked, but the concept was great and there was a lot of effort put into that, a lot of skills--time management, knowledge, reading, writing. But my daughter had hoped to learn a lot about American history. She might have learned a little bit about specific history regarding her two topics that she chose but when she goes off to college and has written down that she has had American history, she's going to do a lot of reading on her own to augment what she learned there.

Mr. Amberson: The teachers in their quest to provide as much independent learning for kids may not always put enough pressure on some of the kids to do a certain amount of work. They might need to assess some of the laggards who need some push. I think their philosophy is this: "There's all this learning out there, we'll give you the tools to do it and you go do it." That's not enough for some kids. From this curriculum should come the experience that I had, and I realize that in my high school "projects" class. there were just kids who were interested in this kind of stuff and who wanted to be there. I know that 120 seniors aren't all going to want to be in a social studies program, but there's going to be 10, 15 or 20 who would love to do what I did and I believe that the teachers could provide that. It's the same idea as the math--pull out those kids who have a high interest in social sciences, politics, government history, whatever--and give them a real enriched piece of this program. I think that's the next step.

Mrs. Reidy: Hmmm. With an 85? Boy, that would be kind of steep for some kids. That really could be. Um, I would even go along with like a 78 or something like that, but an 85 is really pushing for some kids.

Mrs. Jefferson: I don't think that is unreasonable. I don't think kids are pushed enough. I think kids can probably work up to what they are expected to do. Not that every child in that class can probably get an 85% but if they don't think they have to try they won't. And I don't think there is anything wrong with that.

Mrs. Gleason: No I don't like such a high requirement because it's not fair to children that do struggle. You know, everybody's different. I don't think anybody should be made to take it over because they didn't make an 85 average. I figure if a child is really struggling and trying to make a 70 or a 75 that they should be allowed to pass because they're going to find something out in the world to do that's at their level. It 's not fair to hold somebody else back and make them look foolish in their friend's eyes.

Mrs. Halliwell: I liked the fact that the standards were clearly articulated. I would like to see more of that carried over. I'm known in my school as the criteria lady because I've taught every seventh grader what criteria is, how you use it in schools, how kids can generate criteria for product forms and for work that they do. So it was very exciting for me to have somebody else do it. But I don't think it's spread throughout the school yet.

The challenge facing secondary school leaders is figuring out how to create opportunities for parents with diverse backgrounds and diverse views to come together, to listen to each other's perspective, to understand each other's perspective and to come to some common understandings. School people hear individually from parents about their concerns. A cacophony of voices is heard through the revolving doors--parents advocating for their child, angry about a new program, angry about something that a teacher did. The voices heard are usually those of parents who are angry. Rarely do those who are satisfied or pleased speak up. And then there are those who are not informed about what's going on in school--their opinions remain unformed and silent. How can educational leaders help parents to understand that among parents there are diverse perspectives, encourage the exchange of ideas among parents with different perspectives, help parents to realize that schools are faced with competing notions of what's best for "my child", engage parents in dialogue about competing ideas. How can educational leaders make sure that the voices of all parents, not just those with influence, are heard and listened to?

Obstacle: Dark Side of Professional Learning Communities

While professional learning communities have been applauded by many for contributing significantly to a teacher's knowledge base about curriculum and pedagogy, there has been a dark side to this practice. As a result of being involved in these communities, teachers have created a common language and common understandings about

"good" classroom practices. These new "mental models", jointly constructed, move far away from the "mental models" which were the residue of their educational pasts. They have had the opportunity of uncovering these old images and assumptions and of creating new ones. Now certainly not all teachers are involved in these conversations, nor have all those involved come to the same conclusions, but these newer "mental models" are becoming more and more part of the discourse in many of our schools.

Parents, on the other hand, are not a part of these learning communities and don't have the opportunity to examine their existing mental models and to create new ones. As a result the gap between parental and educator understandings about what goes on in "good" schools continues to widen. Reports such as *First Things First: What Americans Expect From Their Public Schools* (Johnson & Immerwahr, 1994) illustrate just how large this gap has grown. This is also the case in Grover's Corners. For the past ten years educators have been involved with each other in trying to come to consensus about what classroom practices should go on in their school. It has not been an easy process and there still remain pockets of discontent where teachers disagree. While they have made some efforts to include parents in this dialogue they have not been very successful and so parents are left with little understanding about the new practices. In the following excerpt from one of the readers theater scripts parents talk past each other about their understandings of what goes on in "good" schools and classrooms.

Educator 1: We joined professional networks that led us to believe that we could make curriculum decisions, that we could make decisions about our classrooms, that we could think about teaching. It was a major philosophical change in teaching from teacher as a behaviorist, a dispenser of information, an informer, to teacher as a learner, a constructor of knowledge. We began to gain a deeper understanding of how human beings learn and we began to totally and radically change the organization of our classrooms so that constructivist practices really were evident.

Parent 1: Since the 60's they have been guilty of increasingly taking their eye off the drills and skills. I sat through some student presentations and I was absolutely appalled. Now I don't expect sophomores in high school to be professional presenters. I don't expect them to be practiced. I love the kids, I love their charm, I love their honesty. But I was appalled with their lack of education. You don't expect a sophomore to put up a poster which has five spelling mistakes on it--not even corrected spelling mistakes. Therefore I lose interest in the reasoning behind organizing the presentation. All I see is spelling mistakes that a kid of 15 makes--why doesn't this kid know how to spell? The response I get is "Oh well that's less important than what they're trying to say." Not to me it isn't!

Educator 2: We had to tap a new framework. And the new framework was focusing on some real simple trans-level, trans-disciplinary demonstrations. And those demonstrations we call compulsory performances. Those are performances that you do in graduate school and you do in kindergarten--reading, writing, illustrating, data analysis, oral presentations, things you do to show that you know something. In

1970 there was a common belief that you were either a writer or you weren't a writer. And if you weren't a writer that was O.K. You did better with cars or you did better with math formulas. Twenty-five years later every educator in the state practically is saying "Writing is important for all students." So we started there, with writing. But we are now asking "Is data analysis, illustrating, diagramming also important for all students?" "Is that as important a performance as is writing? If it is, it should be compulsory, it should be required of all students. I suspect we will say yes, but we have to get clear about what that really means. In fact the next meeting on the 30th is exactly that. To discuss what data analysis, illustrating, and diagramming might look like.

Parent 2: I would like them to teach my son how to read and how to write and how to spell. He does not have any of those capabilities. I mean, he can write but he can't spell and his reading is probably on a 5th grade level.

The challenge for secondary school leaders is to find ways to include parents in the learning communities educators have found to be so worthwhile. They must also find ways to speak more plainly about their understandings. Jargon or "power words" as one parent put it, add to the distance between parents and educators. Schools must find ways to infuse their environment with opportunities for parents and educators to learn together in order to ensure that parents and educators develop and share a common language and in order to ensure that the gap between parent understandings and educator understandings narrows instead of widens.

Obstacle: Ambivalence About Including Parents as Equal Members of the School Community

American society is in the throes of a dynamic struggle between expert knowledge and public knowledge--between the professional and the lay public (Schon, 1994). Much of the 20th century has been characterized by public trust in the ability of the professionals (by science) to solve our most pressing problems. However, doubt about "expert" knowledge has begun to creep into the public consciousness. The recognition of the complexity of the problems faced by our society has led to the realization that professional expertise alone cannot solve them. Thus, the public no longer trusts the experts without question. Ironically, this crisis comes just at a time when educators are gaining their voice as professionals. For too long teachers were regarded as technicians--transmitters of instruction conceived by the experts in the universities. As a result of the reforms of the 1980s the teacher voice was raised to professional status (Lieberman, 1988). This created a dynamic tension between newly empowered professional educators and parents who want their voices attended to (Crowson, 1992; Gold & Miles, 1981; Goldring & Bauch, 1995; Henry, 1994; Henry, 1996; Strike, 1993).

Teachers in Grover's Corners High School, recently invited into the role of professional, are not sure what parents have to offer the conversation about curriculum and pedagogy. While they were pressured by their funding sources to include parents in the process, they were never very successful in engaging more than a handful of parents. This is possibly because of the ambivalence they felt. The following excerpt from one of the readers theater scripts illustrates this ambivalence.

Stage Manager: Teachers and parents in Grover's Corners have different experiences with schooling and therefore, have different "mental models" of what goes on in "good" secondary schools. One way of creating shared meanings and common mental models is by involving parents and teachers in joint planning activities so that they can learn together, but Grover's Corners educators are ambivalent about involving parents in conversations about what goes on in good schools.

Educator 2: That's been one of my frustrations all along with some of the curriculum changes that have come down. That there's been no opportunity to debate in front of the public. The administration in education, not only here but everywhere, talks a good game about wanting a variety of opinions--this and that. No we don't. What's funny is if you had a debate out in the community about educational change, if you will, I think the majority of the teachers would side with change probably philosophically. But the majority of the public wouldn't. See, I consider myself in a majority.

Educator 3: Parental involvement, defining it. That is tough. Does somebody get to go in there and be the veto power. What happens when they are opposed? Do they just stop everything or is their role to present their concerns and then....My feeling is that concerns need to get on the table and that the people who are best equipped to address the concerns get to do that. In the math situation it is the math teachers. "Okay, what are your concerns, parents?" "How do we address these, teachers?" It is the same thing with the schedule. We wouldn't have changed the schedule if we were trying to work with the consensus model. But it was "Okay, what are the concerns of teachers, students, parents." We made modifications and said "This is how we're going to address those concerns."

Educator 4: Parent involvement in the beginning? It was minimal. It was minimal and so we ended up being the snake oil salesman again trying to go out and say, "Here, this is what we have done." When we were writing our student outcomes, we invited them in, and we had them clustered in the rooms and shared our ideas with them, but we didn't have any real vehicle for two-way communication. There was a lot more distance between parents and teachers than there is now. So knowing what we know now, I would definitely have had the parents go over the outcomes in tandem with the staff and have them more involved in developing them.

Educator 1: It would be fairly rare, in modern medicine for doctors to bring their patients together and ask them which kind of technique or chemicals would best help the healing process. Now it may be worthwhile to bring patients together about service issues and fee issues and how comfortable they feel with the doctor--that might be important--but the technical aspects are left to the doctors. Why is education different? Because most people in our society have a high school education, there's an assumption that most people are educational experts or at least they're close to it,

even though that isn't the case. And so there's a level at which there's some kind of automatic democratization of the profession. I think that's overall good. But I think one of the questions that we don't ask is "In what ways are parents most effectively involved in the educational process."

Educator 2: I share the opinion that parents should trust educators to make the right decisions because they are the professionals. I'll give you some examples. The math program probably would not be in place if we had to go through a consensus model with parents involved. If we had to get parents involved they would have been adamantly against it.

Educator 3: I don't give a tinker's damn what parents think! That's the problem with asking parents for their input. They think that we will use it all--when they're just thinking about what's good for their kid. We have to think about what's good for all kids.

Educator 4: Let me tell you about reforms we have implemented at the high school. One is the math program and one is the social studies program. Now these are major, MAJOR fundamental thrusts forward in American education. If we had yielded to the immediate reaction of the most vocal part of the community, we would have put water on a spark that may be one of the most powerful fires, if you will, in education reform. As difficult as it would be for me to say this directly to parents (I guess I would because it would be a lack of integrity for me not to) there is a need for educators who have thought carefully about these ideas to put them into practice and then to get feedback from parents. Schools are democratic--but only democratic up to a point.

The challenge for educational leaders is to redefine what they mean by professional. Both Henry (1994) and Crowson (1992) call for educators to redefine what it means to be a professional. Crowson (1992) argues that teachers are going to have to redefine what being a professional means. He argues "...the definition of 'professional' in education must increasingly include a respect for and even the activation of, not-school resources and interests" (p. 47) and "...safeguarding the public interest can be accomplished by reconstructing professionalism toward an activation of, rather than a protection from, the not-school in public education" (p.55). Henry (1994) also argues that a new definition of professionalism is needed. She offers a conception of teacher professionalism informed by feminist thought. She argues that professionals must "...be willing to not hide behind bureaucratic norms and ethics and a traditional 'professional' cloak that distances them from families. We need to view the teacher as a professional who is enhanced by his/her community" (p.17).

Unfortunately, because educators have only recently put on the cloak of the professional, asking them to redefine it to include learning "with" parents may prove to be very difficult, indeed.

Obstacle: Lack of Mutual Trust and Respect

In order to create the type of dialogues necessary for uncovering 'mental models' and for co-constructing new mental models parents and educators must build a foundation of mutual trust and respect (Sarason, 1995). This basic ingredient--mutual trust and respect--was missing for many of the parents and educators with whom I spoke. Many Grover's Corners parents and educators have memories of past experiences which undermine their trust and respect for each other. The following script excerpt illustrates what memories parents bring to the process:

Stage Manager: Some parents remember their joint planning experiences with school people in a positive way...

Parent 1: I absolutely felt that I was listened to and respected. And it was not just as a token either. At first I thought, well they just need a parent and I'm willing to do it, so I'm elected. But actually I've made suggestions at different times and they've been implemented. I've also learned a great deal. I went in with some preconceived notions--things that I thought were wrong. For instance, I was concerned about exhibitions a whole bunch because I thought it was going to be something teachers hide behind. Then at one meeting they had the rubrics, that was a key thing to me that built my confidence back up because the rubric spells out everything the child needs to do so the teacher, the child and the parents can see exactly what the child can and cannot do. I like that.

Stage Manager: But other parents' memories cast a negative light on the experience--creating barriers of mistrust.

Parent 2: I got more involved with some of the changes in the high school--the high school started some radical reorganization type changes. They'd send home these memos inviting parents to attend these public meetings. I'd read the memo and it was quite clear what the intent was and how this thing was going to work. Then you'd go to one of the public hearings and it was almost like, wait a minute, we're not even on the same topic. When some of the questions would come up and the responses, it was obvious that it had been presented in a particular light to sell the concept. And then when you'd get into a group of parents and other teachers and open the thing up and start discussing, it was obvious that a lot of the information that should have been presented for good objective evaluation had been deliberately omitted to try to skew things in a particular direction.

Parent 3: I think they invite us to meetings with the attitude "We're going to do it...

Parent 4: *(Standing when speaking)* ...whatever it is they're proposing,

Parent 3: We've just got to make sure we sell the concept in the public discussion. That way when the parents leave, they're all nodding their heads saying "Well, that's a good idea." I think they put a lot of effort into doing that, and I'm not really sure that's wrong to do things that way. But I think it is if you're presenting it as a public discussion and soliciting input, it really is under false pretense.

Parent 4: The junior high had been having some meetings. That's why I called. I got a notice the junior high was going to meet and I said, "Well when the high school

starts having meetings I'd like to be called" and I never heard anything. Yeah, I had called up and talked to the fellow in charge of the program at the high school. I wanted to be in on the high school planning team, no matter what happened. He said

Educator 1: *(Standing when speaking)* "I'll take your name"

Parent 4: ...and I never heard any more. I asked and somebody said

Educator 1: *(Standing when speaking)* "Well, they have enough people."

Parent 4: So I just let it go.

Parent 1: There's another interesting little piece. Sometimes, it seems that if you volunteer to be on a committee, if they think it will be to their benefit to have you there, they will invite you. If they, for whatever reason, don't want to deal with you on a committee, they won't invite you...you don't know when the meetings happened and you don't know what happened.

Parent 2: I think there definitely has been a gap developing between the groups, the townspeople and the school people. I think they really need to start including parents in the planning from the ground up and ask "Would you like to be on a study committee?" And really let some of the townspeople start on the ground level rather than having the thing already outlined in a ten page document with a predetermined outcome.

Parent 3: Well, I've been on a planning team from the ground up. Let me tell you about it. Last week I was at the planning meeting. There were 23 of us around the table. I was the only non-teacher parent present. Generally there are no more than three or four of us, maximum. Now you also have to understand that if 20 of them are teachers in the Grover's Corners system and you've got the superintendent of education there, the high school principal there, all of these people....you do not have 20 independent minds. These are all employees and if a teacher feels strongly against an idea he or she has got to be fairly confident before they put up a hand and say

Educator 2: *(Standing when speaking)* "Wait a minute, wait a second here, I don't think this works because..."

Parent 3: So, there is a "group think" going on. You know, it's the way you all wind up going to a restaurant you'd rather not go to because nobody stood up and said "I don't want to go out to a restaurant." Either there's so much agreement between themselves that debate isn't necessary or else they are reluctant as a group to debate the issues. I mean the group I'm involved with, very well intended, hard working conscientious people are reluctant to say "I think this stinks." I certainly wouldn't couch it in those words, and yet progress would be made if a few involved, if a few of the teachers based on 25 years experience of teaching would say

All Educators: *(Standing when speaking)* "I think this stinks."

Parent 3: There's nothing wrong with that.

The following excerpts from the scripts illustrate educators' sense of parental mistrust:

> **Educator 4:** It is often suspected that for some reason teachers have ulterior motives for wanting to make changes. The public has a hard time believing that we are looking out for the best interest of their children.

> **Educator 2:** An ideal relationship between parents and teachers has to be based on some mutual respect, mutual trust--that we understand their point of view, they understand ours--that there's some trust established. Not that being skeptical is bad, but there's got to be that underlying trust that we're trying to do the best job we can do. And I think that's what makes breakdowns. It's when it appears that trust isn't there, from either side, or that we're not listening to them or we're not listening to their interest, that we have gotten into trouble with each other.

The challenge for educational leaders is to attempt to build, rebuild or fortify a foundation of mutual trust and respect between parents and educators. In order for trust and respect to develop parents and educators must find the time to have "rich and frequent social relations" (Strike, 1993, p. 269) so that they can begin to forge a functional community. And then from the base of a functional community--one where people know and trust each other--efforts to form a valuational community can begin.

Obstacle: Perceptions of "No Time"

Parents aren't sure they have the time to devote to the time consuming task of forging common ideas about "good" schools. While the town still maintains some of the characteristics of a small town where residents know each other, look out for each other's children, and enforce similar norms, this is diminishing as more parents move in "from away", work away from town, and are kept busy working more than one job and managing their family's concerns. Many of the parents I interviewed complained about the frantic pace of life these days, with little time left for activities beyond their jobs and home responsibilities. School matters are not at the center of their lives, they are just one of many competing responsibilities to home, family, church, job, and community. In addition, a few parents alluded to the fact that as their children become high school students, they (the parents) are moving through another passage in their lives. They are interested in their own personal development and are considering going back to school, becoming more involved in their jobs, or pursuing other interests.

Educators, too, complain about the lack of time to plan together, to learn together. This has been one of the most enduring issues raised by educators involved in reform efforts (i. e.: Prestine, 1994). In fact, Grover's Corners reform efforts started with the redesign of their school day so that teachers would have a forty minute block of time each

week to plan together. But even that never seemed to be enough time. In the following script excerpts parents and educators consider the issue of time.

Stage Manager: Time is also a barrier. Parents and educators both lament the time school planning takes.

Educator 1: The change that I guess I disagree with is that the teachers have less student contact. I think we've had more meetings that were supposedly making us better professionals, and in some cases they do. More committees, more proposals--all those things take us away from the kids. And although some of those do some wonderful things, we've got a lot out of them, we've got to look at what our mission is in the long run. It's hard to balance. There just isn't enough time.

Parent 2: If they were to come to me and ask me my opinion, as you did, I would be very willing to do that. I would be very willing to give it. But because of time restraints and my activities surrounding my son outside of school, I'm not sure how much more I could do.

Parent 1: In common with most civic work in committee, progress is painfully slow and each participant is careful to grant respect and courtesy to another member's position or opinion. This tends to lead to extreme hair splitting within discussions on any aspect.

Educator 2: I think we could have done more of sending out something to parents. I think our communication tended to come after the fact to inform them of these changes rather then involve them in these changes. I don't know how it would have worked that other way but in looking back it may have slowed us down even more. And I think we felt it was time we had to move. We had to act.

The challenge for educational leaders is to commit themselves to finding ways to find time in the school's day to involve parents and educators in a variety of on-going interactions. Squeezing the time out of the day's work will require educational leaders to make it a priority. It can't be added on to what is already happening. Perhaps school leaders need to ask " How can we redesign what we are already doing so as to involve parents and educators in more active dialogue with each other?" For instance, perhaps parent conferences, open houses, and other already existing opportunities to interact can be designed to be more interactive and a mini-learning opportunity for both parents and educators. One principal in the Grover's Corners school district talks of "small practices"--of taking every time a parent and a teacher or administrator meet as an opportunity to build new understandings (Konzal, 1994). Time, one of the most important resources a school has needs to be harnessed to serve the needs of the school. And it can be done. Only recently it was thought that there was no way to change the day's schedule to allow for longer blocks of learning time. Now it is commonly done in many high schools. Once we think it is possible, we will find ways to do it--if we really want to.

Some Final Thoughts

The dilemmas for secondary school leaders engaged in reform efforts in their schools are complex. I started this study from the perspective that we needed to find ways to engage parents in the conversations around school reform in order to convince them that the changing classroom practices that educators are introducing are good for their children. Through the course of this study I came to realize that a more productive stance for educational leaders is one where together professionals and parents construct notions of what goes on in "good" schools. For this to take place leaders will need to rethink their mental models of the roles that parents should play in schools and devise ways of engaging all parents in a learning community. If secondary schools (and indeed all schools) want to take seriously the idea of a community inclusive of parents, they must infuse the community with opportunities for parents and educators to come together and to learn together--to learn about each other, each other's perspectives, and to learn from each other. Parents and educators bring different expertise to the conversation. Parents know and understand their children (although I do realize that many parents of adolescents throw up their hands and say "I just don't know what to do with him/her anymore"), they have knowledge, information, and insight into their child's interests, learning style and needs, and they know their community--its resources, values, history and rituals. Educators know their subject matter, know about teaching and learning and are connected to professional networks. Bringing all this expertise together in ways that help each learn about the other's expertise will, I suggest, lead to the development of educational practices which are superior to those developed without parental participation and have a better chance of taking root in the school..

A recent conversation I had with two parents throws some light on the possibility of doing this. Two parents were discussing inclusion as a way of meeting the needs of children with disabilities. One, a parent of a child with disabilities, was an advocate for inclusion. The other, a parent whose children did not have disabilities, didn't support inclusion. She feared that her children would get less attention from teachers overwhelmed with children with special needs. To my surprise, rather than getting into an argument, the parent advocate for inclusion listened intently to the other parent's concerns and then said "This is exactly why it is important for you to be on our inclusion task force made up of parents and teachers. Your views and concerns must be addressed. I think that together we can work to make sure that the supports that teachers need to make this work are put in place." In this case, this parent recognized that other parents have views different from hers and that for the good of her child and for the good of all children it was important for

them to come together to examine their diverse perspectives and attempt to come to common understandings.

Clearly there are many obstacles to overcome if parents are to become participating members of a secondary school community. However, while this approach is more complicated, will take more time, and may not necessarily lead to the same teaching and learning practices which would have been developed had only professionals been involved, I suggest that practices developed in this way would have more of a chance of becoming a lasting part of the school program.

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* pseudonym